



■ ■
■ redesigning
the american
high school



Help
wanted



In the knowledge-based economy of the future, all good jobs will require education, skill and training that goes beyond high school. Whether our young adults are going on to college or beginning careers, they have to leave high school with a foundation for success.

Too often, they are not getting that solid foundation. High school students, particularly seniors, increasingly report they have checked out of school long before the last bell rings. Too many college students—in both our four-year institutions and community colleges—don't stay in school. And, employers aren't getting the kind of skilled workers they need to succeed and prosper in today's increasingly competitive economy.



It is time for a new approach to high school—one that both challenges our students more and gives them new opportunities to engage in meaningful, lifelong learning.

Virginia Governor Mark Warner

Chairman, National Governors Association

2004–2005



the challenge ahead

High school has changed little in the past century. It has been called a “sorting out place” for our system of education, and much worse, by the students it is supposed to serve. Visit any high school in America and students, particularly seniors, will report that they are bored, disengaged and simply waiting for the next phase of life to begin. So-called “senioritis” should no longer be considered a benign rite of passage by parents, teachers and the community at large; instead, it should be recognized as a waste of time and resources, and a lost opportunity for learning.

At the same time that high school is failing to prepare many of our students, the global economy is demanding even more from high school graduates. Today's economy is not only generating more new jobs that require higher levels of skill, but existing jobs also require more education and better training. Two-thirds of all new jobs created over the next decade will require some post-secondary education, but our high schools are not preparing youth for this future. Consider the facts:

- Only 70 percent of all high school students earn their diploma.
- The United States now ranks 17th among developed nations in the percentage of youth graduating from high school.
- Of those students who graduate, only three out of 10 are ready to attend a four-year college.
- For those students who enter college, only 40 percent actually earn a degree.
- For the first time, the United States does not lead the world in college graduation rates. Great Britain, Finland, the Netherlands and New Zealand have surpassed us in that measure.

an agenda for reform

The Chairman's Initiative for 2004–2005 will raise national awareness about the urgent need to improve America's high schools, with a particular focus on the senior year. We will begin to forge a national consensus on how high school students can get a jump on their college careers and enter the workforce with the skills needed for today's high-skilled jobs. We will examine ways that state and local governments can better collect data on student performance in high school and beyond; intervene when students are at risk of failure; and ensure that they are **successful** after graduation. Making high school more challenging and relevant to student needs will be at the heart of the Chairman's Initiative.

In building this agenda, we'll look to the successful initiatives already launched in other states. The Commonwealth of Virginia, for example, has initiated Virtual AP Courses and expanded dual enrollment to allow seniors to earn up to a semester's worth of college credit while still in high school. All high school students in Arkansas will soon take a Smart Core curriculum to better prepare for college and higher-skills work. Louisiana is finding ways to raise the achievement and college enrollment rates of rural high school students. In Maine, the governor is transforming vocational education and offering high school students a full, tuition-free year of technological or career-based postsecondary learning. Ambitious high school redesign and after-school and summer school sessions are helping nine out of 10 Massachusetts high school students pass their high-stakes exit exam test, judged to be one of the nation's most rigorous tests. Ohio leads other states in its commitment to open smaller, personalized high schools and to accelerate postsecondary learning.

under this initiative

The National Governors Association will....

- Raise national awareness on the need for improving America's high schools and the consequences of inaction.
- Hold learning institutes for governors' senior advisors in education that will focus on ways states are successfully supporting new high school options and helping students at risk to graduate.
- Develop a series of best practices and a “Top 10” list of policy actions governors can take to achieve system-wide high school reform in their states.
- Convene town hall meetings around the country where students, teachers, administrators, and parents can talk about high school, the senior year and impediments to greater success.
- Create a set of common definitions for graduation and dropout rates that governors can use to compare their progress relative to other states.



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